

THE SOUTHEAST ASIA PRISONER-OF-WAR HISTORICAL COLLECTION

Special Collections Branch

AIR FORCE ACADEMY LIBRARY

ABOUT THE COLLECTION

The Air Force Academy Library, Colorado Springs, Colorado holds a major and continuously growing collection of documents, photographs, film and artifacts about the American prisoner-of-war experience across Southeast Asia during the dozen years of the Vietnam War. The documentary portion of the collection has been assembled largely from the files of the Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense, where the official history *Honor Bound* was written by Frederick Kiley and Stuart Rochester between 1974 and 1998. This portion of the collection has been supplemented by documents, films, photographs, and audio materials from several other sources, official and private.

The artifact portion of the collection has come largely from the generous donation of a private citizen, Mr. Lee Humiston, who assembled the material over many years for the purpose of creating a historical record of the sacrifice and heroism of the American prisoners of war.

The Southeast Asia Prisoner-of-War Collection is now the largest and most nearly definitive collection in the United States.



Scene from the 1966 "Hanoi March" of manacled POWs through hostile crowds on the streets of Hanoi.



An injured pilot being marched to prison on a Hanoi street.

THE DOCUMENTARY COLLECTION

The documentary materials include the following:

- drafts and supporting documents for the book *Honor Bound*,
- chronologies of the war and the POW experience,
- more than 100 reports and studies, and a similar number of books,
- dozens of academic papers on the POW experience,
- letters and memoranda devoted to official policy and planning,
- a rich body of material devoted to Operation Homecoming, the repatriation of American POWs in 1973,
- more than 8000 photos and a growing collection of films and videos,
- numerous charts, maps, and graphs,
- oral histories by former POWs.

SUBJECTS

Researchers and interested readers may study not only the history itself but also such subjects as these:

- communication and resistance in captivity,
- torture and other forms of exploitation,
- leadership in the crisis of imprisonment,
- the value of the Code of Conduct as an ethical guide,
- survival training as preparation for captivity,
- dealing with medical problems in captivity,
- coping with an onerous day-to-day existence,
- escape efforts and their consequences,
- problems caused by collaborators,
- planning for repatriation itself.

By 2003, this documentary collection will be enriched by: (1) the addition of a Department of Defense archive on wartime POW policy and planning, and (2) by the creation of CDs and interactive DVDs that will make available a substantial portion of the documentary material and artifact collection for use on personal computers.



An infamous “tiger cage” used to hold POWs in South Vietnam.



Colonel Risner, senior POW in Hanoi for many years, being marched to interrogation.

THE ARTIFACT COLLECTION

A particularly fascinating highlight of the Southeast Asia Prisoner-of-War Collection is the more than 150 artifacts contributed by returned POWs and donated to the Library by Mr. Lee Humiston. Included in the collection are items like these:

- prison camp uniforms,
- drinking cups that might have been a POW's only "possession" for 5 years or longer and that also served as communication devices,
- religious beads and crosses made covertly from scrap material and concealed by POWs for many years,
- tiny playing cards and chess and checker boards made from hoarded bits of paper and cardboard,
- tiny tools crafted from bits of metal and wood,
- tiny notebooks of foreign-language vocabulary written in miniscule script with secretly made ink,
- clothing items of differing sorts issued to prisoners at repatriation from North and South Vietnam, Laos and China,
- a POW camp guard's helmet "liberated" from Hanoi.



The Collection contains such artifacts as the prison uniform on the manikin, the cup and spoon on the mat and the rubber-tire sandals.

HOW TO HELP

The Air Force Academy Library values this collection highly. It constitutes a rich source of unique original historical documents and priceless artifacts that are widely studied by the Academy's cadets, who thus learn the importance of using primary sources for their research papers.

The collection is supported by the Friends of the Air Force Academy Library, a nonprofit, tax-exempt foundation established to provide the Library with services not available through appropriated funding. The Friends' goal is to collect primary source material covering the experience of American airmen who were POWs in the nation's major wars of this century, from World War I through Desert Storm. Individuals considering an offer of a gift of materials or financial support are invited to write to:

*THE FRIENDS OF THE
AIR FORCE ACADEMY LIBRARY*
Post Office Box 188
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Colonel Risner and Commander Stockdale arrive at Clark AFB during Operation Homecoming, 1973.